

*Langley Vance, U. H. Vance Jr.*

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Deployment and Use of OXCART (A12)

Admiral Raborn's paper makes a good case in general terms for the need for better photographic coverage of South China and North Vietnamese targets which have an actual or potential bearing on the conduct of hostilities in Southeast Asia. It lacks specific information of the nature and importance of the photography and gives no clear indication of the freshness of the available coverage. The recommendation would be strengthened by the addition of such information and also by an estimate of the additional coverage which would be expected if OXCART were used. One has the feeling that, because of bad weather, the immediate gain of deploying and using OXCART may be quite small and, thus, may not justify incurring the disadvantages at this time.

The Defense position as expressed to me by Mr. Vance is that the present coverage of North Vietnamese targets is reasonably adequate and that the deficiencies in Chinese coverage could probably be met by a more aggressive use of presently available reconnaissance resources, [redacted]

As these differences of view between Defense and the Intelligence Community are based largely on ascertainable facts, I suggest asking Mr. Vance and Admiral Raborn to try to reconcile their positions as far as possible before seeking your decision.

The basic question, then, is whether OXCART is needed now for use in relation to the war situation in South Viet-Nam and I would suggest withholding judgment until the following questions are answered more clearly than they are now.

a. How adequate is the present photo coverage of North Vietnamese and South Chinese targets?

b. To what extent would deficiencies be met by stepped-up use of present reconnaissance means? By the immediate deployment and use of OXCART?

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OSD review(s) completed.

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Regardless of the answer to these questions, there is another argument for an early deployment and use of OXCART based on the long term needs for strategic photography of China. If we are ever going to violate Chinese airspace by covert manned aircraft for this purpose, now would seem a very good time to begin. We have the war situation in Viet-Nam and Chicom bellicose statements to justify overflight reconnaissance in the interest of detecting and forestalling preparations to expand the war. If we feel unable to use OXCART under these circumstances, it is hard to imagine its use at all for covert, manned penetrations of denied airspace--its sole justification for existence.

With regard to the consequences of use, all parties are agreed that we must assume that Hanoi and Peking will be aware of these overflights from the outset and that the U.S. and international public will learn about them in due course as the result of a downed plane, of public denunciation by our enemies, or by a leak to the press. The reaction of the Red Chinese leaders is hard to forecast. While it might be violent in words, after accepting drone overflights so calmly, it is hard to believe that a manned aircraft would provoke them to imprudent action. Because of the sonic boom of the OXCART, it will be difficult to conceal these overflights from the Chinese people although some cover is provided by the booms of supersonic Chinese aircraft. Thus, Peking might be inclined to denounce our overflights prior to capturing a plane and appeal to world opinion to cause us to desist. International opinion and segments of U.S. opinion would condemn our action as provocative but probably a majority of our citizens at home would take the opposite view that it is wrong under present circumstances to withhold the use of a means of reconnaissance capable of giving warning of a surprise attack on our forces.

In the papers before you on this issue, I have not found a discussion of the posture our government should take after the disclosure of OXCART overflights. We ought not be caught unprepared as we were at the time of the U-2 shoot-down over the USSR. This time we will need to show composure, know our position and stand on it in spite of outcries. Just how that position should be expressed needs a determination before final action is taken on this issue.

As I see it, you have three alternatives at this time.

a. Approve Admiral Raborn's recommendation to deploy and use OXCART at once over North Viet-Nam, gradually moving to South Chinese targets.

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b. Disapprove the deployment of OXCART and, accepting the unlikelihood of its use over China, push the development and use of other means (U-2, drones, satellites).

c. Approve Admiral Raborn's recommendation for planning purposes, with target date for deployment set for about September 1. Utilize the interim to complete the gaps in the case for and against this proposal, some of which have been mentioned above.

I recommend alternative c.

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